

Disability Liaison Group

Wednesday, 15 November 2006

Present:

Chorley Borough Councillors:

Councillor David Dickinson (Chair) and Councillors Mrs Marie Gray, Miss June Molyneaux, Rosemary Russell, Mrs Iris Smith, Ralph Snape and Mrs Stella Walsh

Officers:

Roger Handscombe (Director of Property Services), Elaine Knott (LCC Highways Area South), Sarah Dobson (Policy and Performance), Cindy Lowthian (District Partnership Officer), Steve Lloyd (Registration Service, Lancashire County Council), Suzanne Cox (Astley Park Project Officer), Margaret Stansfield (Compliance Manager, Revenues and Benefits), Jonny Riemer (Team Leader, Quality Team, Revenues and Benefits) and Ruth Hawes (Democratic Services Officer)

Disability Forum Representatives:

Eileen Bee (Disability Forum Co-Ordinator), Terence Reynolds (Disability Forum Vice-Chairman), Ivy Carrol, Steven Cross, Judy Daniels (Disability Forum), Alison Hansford (Disability Forum), Maureen Kay (Deaf and Disability Forum) and Clive Yates (Disability Forum)

Sign Language Interpreter:

Val Hall (Interpreter)

06.DLG.20 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the officers in attendance.

06.DLG.21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Danny Gee and Cath Hoyle, Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Policy and Performance), Alan Capstick (LCC Highways Area South), Harold Rimmer (Disability Forum Chair), Albert and Rita Jeffries, Devi Nicolson and Maurice Waterhouse.

It was noted that the meeting had clashed with a meeting of Shop Mobility. The Democratic Services Officer undertook to ensure there were no future clashes of the meetings.

06.DLG.22 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

None of the Members disclosed any interests in relation to matters under consideration at the meeting.

06.DLG.23 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Disability Liaison Group held on 14 June 2006 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of apologies for absence from Alison Hansford.

Councillor Snape suggested that a letter be sent to the County Councillors for Chorley requesting that the money released from the disposal of Rydal House be used to provide toilet facilities at Chorley Library. It was AGREED that a letter be sent and copied to the District Librarian.

The Chair reported that a letter had been sent to the District Librarian as agreed at the last meeting and a response had been received advising that there was no timescale for the installation of public toilets at the Library. The response had been shown to Chorley Council's Chief Executive who had undertaken to write to the District Librarian to support the installation of public toilets at the Library.

A query was raised in relation to the cost of concessionary half fares and the charges made by private bus companies. This would be clarified for the next meeting.

In response to a query Roger advised that a letter had been sent to town centre traders highlighting the problems caused to partially sighted people by A boards on pavements.

06.DLG.24 UPDATE ON THE ASTLEY PARK PROJECT

The Chair introduced Suzanne Cox, Astley Park Project Officer, who gave a short presentation to the Group.

Suzanne outlined the history to the project and the progress made to date. She advised that there were plans to reinstate the walled garden and work on the lake, coach house and the paths. There would be an accessible circular walk around the lake, disabled parking spaces behind the walled garden and a lift in the coach house. The work was scheduled to be completed by December 2008.

There was a discussion about the tree clearance that had caused some controversy, although positive comments had since been received about the results.

It was noted that the play area and the pets corner would be relocated. Further consultation would be held with the Group on the signage used. It was suggested that contact be made with Shop Mobility in relation to the use of motorised scooters within the Park.

It was AGREED that copies of the presentation be forwarded to Judy.

The Group thanked Suzanne for her presentation.

06.DLG.25 DISCUSSION REGARDING THE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY SCHEME

The Chair introduced Sarah Dobson, Performance Advisor - Corporate and Customer. Sarah explained that the Forum had been involved in discussions about the Scheme and that the tabled document was still a draft version.

It was noted that the high priority areas would be reviewed by May 2008 and there was an action plan for the next 3 years.

The draft Scheme was discussed it was AGREED to bring the action plan to every meeting of the Group to review the progress and to make any suggestions for improvements.

It was AGREED to forward a copy to Judy.

06.DLG.26 UPDATE ON CHORLEY REGISTRY OFFICE

The Group welcomed Steve Lloyd, from Lancashire County Council's Registration Service.

Steve explained that the current Registry office in Chorley did not comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. There was a step to enter the building and the wedding ceremonies were held upstairs, with no lift provided. This was a longstanding problem, and the proposed solution was a new build to house the service as no existing buildings in the area were considered fit for purpose. Steve had been in post 3 months and had made a business plan for a new build, the results of this would be reported to the Group.

In the interim Preston was suggested as an alternative venue and a grab handle or a bell at the entrance to the Chorley office would be investigated. It was AGREED that a letter be written to Lancashire County Council supporting the proposal for a new Registry Office in Chorley and that Steve be invited to attend the next meeting of the Group to give an update.

The Group thanked Steve for the update.

06.DLG.27 BENEFIT TAKE UP STRATEGY

The Group welcomed Margaret Stansfield and Jonny Riemer from the Council's Revenues and Benefits section.

Margaret took the Group through the attached report and highlighted that the Strategy aimed to remove barriers in the way of people claiming benefits and to promote people's entitlements.

The section had contacted people who had not followed through on claims and had set up a visiting section where staff would visit customers in their own home to discuss a claim. Margaret explained that Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit were, by nature, very complex benefits to administer. First of all the person making a claim has to show they are eligible to receive Housing and/or Council Tax Benefit. That is, by being liable to pay rent and/or Council Tax for a property the person occupies as their home. Once eligible, an assessment of entitlement is carried out, which takes into account the circumstances of the person making the claim and the income and circumstances of others living in the same household.

Margaret explained that the aim of this discussion was to ask the Group their experiences, any problems they were aware of and to raise awareness. Officers would come out into the community and provide information. It was noted that information was provided in the form of leaflets and articles in Chorley Borough News.

The Group discussed the need for an interpreter for a deaf person and that the use of jargon was confusing. The need for forms to be clear was highlighted, although it was accepted that the whole process was, by its nature, complex. Work had been undertaken with the Plain English Campaign on the claim form and the letters sent out, but any further suggestions for improvements were welcome. It would be clarified whether the scripts used by the One Stop Shop and forms flagged up a customer who needed assistance.

It was suggested that the benefits calculator on the website was publicised more, the use of a talking newspaper be considered and that current leaflets be passed to Eileen Bee who would distribute them.

It was AGREED that the suggestions be noted and that the officers be invited to give an update on progress at a future meeting.

The Group thanked the officers for their input.

06.DLG.28 ONGOING ISSUES

The Group considered a schedule, prepared by the Director of Property Services, and discussed the following:

Dropped Kerbs,

The dropped kerbs on Bolton Street outside Liveseys Funeral Palour and between the Town Hall and Police Station had both been ordered and would be removed from the schedule.

General Highway Issues,

The potholes on Harpers Lane had been repaired and would be removed from the schedule.

It was agreed that the Grounds Maintenance Area Manager meet Judy Daniels about the trees obstructing lighting on Park Road to pinpoint the exact problem.

Other Issues.

The problems caused by A Board on Market Street were highlighted again. It was noted that the Disability Forum had been consulted on the Town Centre Strategy that was due to be adopted next month. This issue would be kept under review and highlighted again at the Town Centre Forum.

The response from Northern Rail in relation to train announcements and toilet facilities was noted. It was noted that not all trains had toilets on them and that passenger toilet facilities were needed on the station. An email would be sent to Northern Rail suggesting that the colour of the lines on the steps be changed to a buff colour to improve the contrast for partially sighted people.

The lighting at Chorley Interchange was raised and it was noted that although the lighting was not suitable for people who had epilepsy the lighting meant that drug users could not misuse the toilet. It was unfortunate that there was not a solution that satisfied everyone.

It was reported that disabled people had encountered difficulties accessing the facilities at the leisure centres in the borough. It was agreed that there be a presentation on the leisure centres from CLS at a future meeting of the Group.

06.DLG.29 UPDATE ON DISABILITY AWARENESS DAY 2007

Eileen Bee, Disability Forum Co-Ordinator, updated the Group on the plans for the next Disability Awareness Day. She explained that the date had not yet been set but it was likely the day would be held in July. It was noted that the Chorley Wildcats would be involved in the day.

The next meeting of the planning group was scheduled for early December to discuss funding issues. There were thoughts about approaching voluntary groups for assistance with funding. It was suggested that the planning group approach the funding officer at the Council, Sara Cooper on 515337.

It was AGREED that an update on progress be presented to the next meeting of the Group.

06.DLG.30 ANY OTHER ITEM(S) THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES IS/ARE URGENT

Sarah advised that there would be a “Funding for Play” event to be held on 21 November in the Lancastrian, Town Hall. There would be a representative from the Big Lottery Fund and an opportunity to ask questions, share project ideas and search for partners.

06.DLG.31 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on 28 February 2007.

Chair